

Speech by David Hood

Unveiling of Interpretive Panel for Engineering Heritage Marker

Main Outfall Sewer, Canberra – 28 April 2012

Welcome to:

Mark Sullivan, Managing Director ACTEW Corporation

Doug Mitchell, President Canberra Division EA

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's a pleasure to be able to join you here today in Canberra for the unveiling of the interpretive panel to commemorate the award of an Engineering Heritage Marker to the Main Outfall Sewer.

Having lived and worked in Canberra over many years, I am always pleased to come back and observe the changes as it develops into the beautiful modern city that it is. Engineering of course has always played an important part in the development of Canberra, often it is in the foreground for all to see such as Parliament House or as is happening now, the construction of the new Cotter Dam. But always in the background, unseen or unnoticed by the majority of us has been the infrastructure projects of water, electricity, roads and sewerage, services that are of course essential for the city to function. Being a planned city built from scratch, Canberra's infrastructure was all designed, engineered and constructed 'from the ground up' and the sewer beneath us is still doing the job it was designed for 85 years later, despite the size of the city growing from something like 5 000 to 350 000. Mark will tell you more about the sewer and its heritage, but I'd like to briefly tell you a little about Engineers Australia's Heritage Recognition Program.

The Engineering Heritage Recognition Program was established in 1984 as a means of bringing public recognition to engineering works of historic or heritage significance, as well as to those engineers who created them. The aims of the program are to encourage the conservation of Australian engineering heritage, and to raise community awareness of engineering and the benefits it provides.

Together with Engineers Australia's Oral history program and our work on the Conservation & Management of Engineering Heritage, the recording of the history of engineering through the recognition program plays an important role in establishing engineers' professional standing within the community. Engineering Heritage Australia and the heritage groups in each State or regional Division carry this responsibility for Engineers Australia.

The Heritage Recognition Program commences with research and evaluation identifying those engineering heritage works considered the most significant. Recommendations are then made for the celebration and marking of those works, and interpretation of them for the public. Since 1984 interpretative markers have been placed on over 140 engineering heritage works across Australia, including 7 here in the ACT.

The Main Outfall Sewer is a great example of that which we in Engineers Australia seek to recognise, record and help to preserve in conjunction with the site owners. In the case of ACTEW, they have been wonderfully supportive of our successful nomination both of this site and of course previously with The Cotter Dam Precinct, and I'd like to publically thank Mark Sullivan, his team at ACTEW and those within the ACT Government Departments for their support and contribution in making today's event a reality. I'd also like to thank Vesna and Colleen from the Canberra Division of Engineers Australia for their efforts in organising today's event.

Engineering Heritage Canberra in conjunction with ACTEW Corporation nominated the Main Outfall Sewer as it contained those elements we look for in the recognition program. The sewer was a key piece of infrastructure that enabled Canberra to commence its role as the Nation's capital. Its heritage though also has a very human element, the story of the men who designed and built this sewer and the associated treatment works over 85 years ago. It's hard to imagine what it would have been like here at that time, particular the hardships of life in the work camps in the middle of a Canberra winter. In recording the history of the sewer, Engineers Australia's Heritage program not only recognises the nuts and bolts of the engineering aspects, but also the social impact of the construction and resultant sewerage system. We are pleased to see that the ACT Heritage Council entered the sewer on their register in August 2011, an ideal adjunct to Engineers Australia's work in recording the social history of this system.

Today's event has been timed to take place as part of Canberra and Region Heritage Festival, a wonderful opportunity for Engineers Australia to be part of the wider community celebration of our region's heritage, an opportunity I am delighted we have taken. As we move towards the Canberra 100 celebrations in 2013, Engineers Australia is heavily involved in planning for activities to be held to commemorate the engineering aspects of the centenary of our Nation's capital, that are of both a heritage and contemporary significance. We look forward to future possible collaborations with ACTEW and ACT Heritage during those activities and indeed, every other opportunity in between.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank Doug and the Canberra Division for the kind invitation to be with you today and to participate in these celebrations. I thank you for turning on such a wonderful Canberra winter's day and I appreciate your kind hospitality.

Draft by Lyndon Tilbrook, Chair Engineering Heritage Canberra, 0400 080 506. 24 April 2012.